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THE
ANGELS'
SONG

Thomas Guthrie.D.D.



M. A. Munson,
1875.

To Walter B. Briggs.

from
Myron Andrews Munson

Oct., 1910.

THE ANGELS' SONG.

ALEXANDER STRAHAN

148 Strand, LONDON
178 Grand Street, NEW YORK

THE ANGELS' SONG

BY THOMAS GUTHRIE, D.D.

AUTHOR OF "MAN AND THE GOSPEL," ETC.



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PART I.



THE birth of an heir to the throne is usually accompanied by circumstances befitting so great an event. No place is deemed worthy of it but a royal palace ; and there, at the approach of the expected hour, high nobles and the great officers of state assemble, while the whole country, big with hope, waits to welcome a successor to its long line of kings. Cannons announce the event ; seaward, landward, guns flash and roar from floating batteries and rocky battlements ; bonfires blaze on hill-tops ; steeples ring out the news in merry peals ; the nation holds holiday, giving itself up to banqueting and enjoyments, while public prayers and thanksgivings rise to Him by whom kings reign and princes decree justice. With such pomp and parade do the heirs of earthly thrones enter on the stage of life ! So came not He who is the King of kings and Lord of lords. On the eve of His birth the

world went on its usual round. None were moved for His coming; nor was there any preparation for the event—a chamber, or anything else. No fruit of unhallowed love, no houseless beggar's child enters life more obscurely than the Son of God. The very tokens by which the shepherds were taught to recognise Him were not the majesty but the extreme meanness of his condition: "This shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." In fact, the Lord of heaven was to be recognised by his humiliation, as its heirs are by their humility. Yet, as we have seen a black and lowering cloud have its edges touched with living gold by the sun behind it, so all the darkest scenes of our Lord's life appear more or less irradiated with the splendours of a strange glory. Take that night on Galilee when a storm roared over land and lake, enough to wake all but the dead. The boat with Jesus and His disciples tears through the waves, now whirling on their foaming crests, now plung-

ing into their yawning hollows ; the winds rave in His ear ; the spray falls in cold showers on His naked face ; but He sleeps. I have read of a soldier boy who was found buried in sleep beneath his gun, amid the cries and carnage of the battle ; and the powers of nature in our Lord seem to be equally exhausted. His strength is spent with toil ; and with wan face and wasted form He lies stretched out on some rude boards—the picture of one whose candle is burning away all too fast, and whom excess of zeal is hurrying into premature old age and an untimely grave. Was the sight such as to suggest the question, Where is now thy God ?—how soon it changed into a scene of magnificence and omnipotent power ! He wakes—as a mother, whom louder sounds would not stir, to her infant's feeblest wail, He wakes to the cry of His alarmed disciples ; and standing up, with the lightning flash illumining His calm, divine face, He looks out on the terrific war of elements. He speaks ; and all is hushed. Obedient to His will, the winds fold their

wings, the waves sink to rest ; and there is a great calm. "Glory to God in the highest !" How may His people catch up and continue the strain which falls from angels' lips ? In disciples plucked from the very jaws of death, and pulling their boat shoreward with strong hands and happy hearts over a moonlit glassy sea, Jesus shows us how He will make good these sayings, "Fear not, for I am with thee ; be not afraid, for I am thy God"—"I have given unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish."

The divine glory of that scene is not peculiar to it. For as an eagle, so soon as she has stooped from her realm to the ground, mounts aloft again, soaring into the blue skies of her native heavens, our Lord never descends into the abasement of His meanest circumstances without some act which bespeaks divinity, and bears Him up before our eyes into the regions of Godhead. The grave, where He weeps like a woman, gives up its prisoner at His word. Athirst by Jacob's well, like any other wayfaring, way-worn traveller, He begs a draught of water from

a woman there, but tells her all she ever did. Houseless and poor, His banquet hall is the open air, His table the green grass, His feast five barley loaves and a few fishes from the neighbouring lake, yet this scanty fare supplies the wants of five thousand guests. His birth and life and death, His whole history, in fact, resembles one of those treasure-chests which double locks secure ; for as that iron safe yields its hoards of gold, silver, pearls, and precious stones to none but Him who brings to each Lock its own appropriate key, so the riches of divine truth, redeeming love, and saving mercy are open only to such as come to Jesus with a belief in His divinity on the one hand, and a belief in His humanity on the other ;—who behold in the child, whose birth was sung by angels, the son of Mary, and worship the only begotten, well beloved, and eternal Son of God.

Now this mingling of divine and human characters distinguished Christ's birth as much as His death. The halo of glory that surrounded His dying, crowned His infant head. His sun rose, as it after-


wards set, behind a heavy bank of clouds ; but the divinity they screened, touched their edges alike with burning gold ; so that He at whose death the rocks were rent, and the sun eclipsed, and graves deserted of their dead, no more entered than He left our world as a common son of Adam. Not that a world which was to reject Him went out to meet its King with homage and royal honours. Omen of coming events, it received Him in sullen silence. But the heavens declared His glory, the skies sent out a sound ; and the tokens of His first advent—unlike the thunders which shall rend the skies when He comes the second time to judgment—were all in beautiful harmony with its object. It was love and saving mercy ; there were light, music, and angel forms. With this object all things indeed were in perfect keeping,—the serene night—the shining stars—the pearly dews glistening on the grass—snowy flocks safely pasturing—and the shepherds themselves, to whom the annunciation was made ; men who, whether going before their charge, or carrying the lambs in their arms, or gently

leading those that were with young, or standing bravely between their flocks and the roaring lion, were the choicest emblems and types of Him who, dying to save us, gave His life for the sheep. To them there suddenly appeared a multitude of the heavenly host, turning night into day, and shedding on the soft hills around a bright but gentle radiance. As guard of honour, they had swept in their downward flight by many a sun and star, escorting the Son of God to our nether world. And now—ere they left Him to tread the wine-press alone, and returned on upward wings to their native heavens, and their service before the throne of God—these celestials bent their loving eyes on the stable; and in anticipation of Jesus' triumphs, of men saved, death conquered, graves spoiled, and Satan crushed, they sang "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

This hymn, sung perhaps in parts by different bands of these heavenly choristers consists of three parts; and we now proceed to the illustration of these.

I.

THAT REDEMPTION YIELDS THE HIGHEST GLORY TO GOD.

 SAY the highest ; for though His *absolute* glory, like His eternal being and infinite perfections, admits of no degrees, and is affected by no circumstances whatever, it is otherwise with His *declarative* glory, as old theologians called it. This, which I speak of, and which angels sung of, consists in the manifestation of His attributes. Whatever it be, though only the drop of water, which appears a world of wonders to the eyes of a man of science, any work is glorious which reflects the divine character in any measure, and still more glorious or glorifying which exhibits it in a greater measure. God's glory expands and unfolds itself as we rise upward in the study of His works—from inanimate

to living objects ; from plants to animals ; from animals to man ; from man to angels ; from these to archangels, upward and still upward, to the Being who, bathed in the full blaze of divine effulgence, tops the pyramid, and stands on the highest pinnacle of Creation. That Being is God manifest in the flesh, our Lord Jesus Christ—the redemption which He wrought for us, through blood and suffering and death, being the work which reveals God most fully to our eyes, and forming a looking-glass, so to speak, to reflect the whole measure of divinity. This will appear if we look at—

The Redeemer.—One of His many titles is the *Wonderful*. Anticipating the royal birth at Bethlehem, and speaking of Christ in terms which no other key can open but the doctrine of His divinity, Isaiah says, “Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given ; and the government shall be upon his shoulder : and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.” With

pencils of sunlight God paints the rose ; by arts of a divine chemistry He turns foul decay into the snow-white purity and fragrant odours of a lily ; He fashions the infant in the darkness of the mother's womb ; He inspires dead matter with the active principle of life ; in man He unites an ethereal spirit to a lump of clay—wonders these which have perplexed the wisest men, and remain as incomprehensible to philosophers as to fools. Yet, as if there was no mystery in these but what our understanding could fathom—as if there was nothing in these to teach proud man humility and rouse his admiration—as if there was indeed no wonder but Christ himself in all this great and glorious universe, He is called by way of eminence the *Wonderful*. And why ? Because, as the stars cease to shine in presence of the sun, quenched by the effulgence, and drowned in the flood of his brighter beams, these lose all their wonders beside this little Child. To a meditative man it is curious to stand over any cradle where an infant sleeps ; and, as we look on the

face so calm, and the little arms gently folded on the placid breast, to think of the mighty powers and passions which are slumbering there ; to think that this feeble nursling has heaven or hell before it ; that an immortal in a mortal form is allied to angels ; that the life which it has begun shall last when the sun is quenched, enduring throughout all eternity. Much more wonderful the spectacle the manger offers, where shepherds bend their knees, and angels bend their eyes ! Here is present, not the immortal, but the eternal ; here is not one kind of matter united to another, or a spiritual to an earthly element, but the Creator to a creature, divine Omnipotence to human weakness, the Ancient of Days to the infant of a day. What deep secrets of divine wisdom, power, and love lie here, wrapped up in these poor swaddling-clothes ! Mary holds in her arms, in this manger with its straw, what draws the wondering eyes, and inspires the loftiest songs of angels. If that be not God's greatest, and therefore most glorifying work, where are we to seek it ?

in what else is it found? "The depth saith, It is not in me; and the sea saith, It is not in me!" Were we to range the vast universe to find its rival, we should return, like the dove to its ark, to the stable-door, and the swaddled babe, there to mingle human voices with the heavenly choir—singing, Glory to God in the highest!

The fact that redemption yields God the highest glory will appear also if we look at—

The Redeemed.—It is in them, in sinners saved, not in the happy and holy angels, that God stands out fully revealed as in a mirror; long and broad enough, if I may say so, to show forth all His attributes. To vary the figure; the cross of Christ is the focus in which all the beams of divinity, all the attributes of the Godhead, are gathered into one bright, burning spot, with power to warm the coldest and melt the stoniest heart. No man hath seen God at any time, otherwise than in His works; and though created things are immeasurably inferior to their Creator,

they may still help us to form some conception of His character. A drop of water is an ocean, a spark of fire is a sun, every grain of sand on the sea-shore is a world, in miniature ; and as those who have never seen ocean, or sun, or world, may form some idea of their appearance by magnifying these their miniatures millions of millions of times, so, by immensely magnifying the age, the power, the wisdom, the holiness of an angel, we could form some dim conception of God. Not that we would not have still to ask, "Who can by searching find out God ? who can find out the Almighty to perfection ?"—not that when we had exclaimed, in the sublime words of Job, "Hell is naked before him, and destruction hath no covering. He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth on nothing. He bindeth up the waters in his thick clouds. He holdeth back the face of his throne. The pillars of heaven tremble and are astonished at his reproof. He divideth the sea with his power. By his spirit he hath garnished the heavens ;"

—we would not have to add with the patriarch, “These are parts of his ways ; but how little a portion is heard of him ? but the thunder of his power who can understand ?”

Study Him, for example, in the angels who sung this birth-song ! They are holy, and we may conclude that their Maker is infinitely holy ; they are wise, and He who made them must possess infinite wisdom ; they are powerful, and He must be omnipotent ; the God of good angels must be infinitely good, as the avenger of sin and evil ones must be infinitely just. This is sound reasoning—for, as David says, “He that planted the ear, shall he not hear ? He that formed the eye, shall he not see ? He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct ? He that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know ?” Still, however lofty and worthy were the conceptions which we thus formed of God, He had never been discovered in the full glory of His gracious character by this or any corresponding process. Unspeakable honour to man and unspeakable

grace in God, the fulness of His character is revealed, not by seraphs but by saints—in redeemed and ransomed sinners. And so Mary Magdalene, as reflecting His attributes more fully than angels, wears in heaven a brighter glory than crowns their unfallen heads. She, and all with her, who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb, are trophies of free, saving mercy; monuments of that love which, when stern justice had dragged us to the mouth of the pit, and angels, who had seen their fellows punished by one awful act of vengeance, stood in dread and silent expectation of another, graciously interposed, saying, “Deliver from going down to the pit, I have found a ransom.” Then, blessed Son of God, thou didst step forward to say, And I am that ransom! From that day heaven was happier. It found a new joy. Angels tuned their golden harps to higher strains; and now, these blessed spirits, above the mean jealousies of earth’s elder brothers, whenever they see Christ born anew in a soul—a sinner born again, called, converted, apparelled in Jesus’

righteousness, rejoicing in His arms, or even weeping at His feet, wake up the old, grand birth-song, singing, "Glory to God in the highest!" "There is joy," said Jesus, "in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth—joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance."

PART II.

B

NO man hath seen God at any time ; so saith the Scriptures. He who is confined to no bounds of space cannot in the nature of things have any visible form. God has however occasionally made revelations of Himself ; and such are described in language which seems opposed alike to the declarations of Scripture and the deductions of reason. It is said, for instance, of Moses and Aaron, when they ascended Mount Sinai, that "they saw the God of Israel ;" and Isaiah tells how he "saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple." Believing with the Jews that if any man saw God he could not survive, but would die as by a flash of lightning, the prophet was struck with terror, and cried, in expectation of immediate death, "I am undone ; for mine eyes have seen the Lord of hosts."

The object seen in these and also other

cases was no doubt the Schekinah—that holy and mysterious flame whereby God made His presence known in the days of old. We know little concerning it beyond this, that it was of the nature of light. The fairest, purest, oldest of created things, passing untainted through pollution, turning gloomy night into day, and imparting their varied beauties to earth and air and ocean, this of all material elements was the fittest symbol of God. A circumstance this to which we probably owe the ancient practice of worshipping the Divinity by fire, and certainly such figures as these: “God is light;” “He clothes himself with light as with a garment;” “He dwelleth in light that is inaccessible and full of glory.” This light, said to have been intensely luminous, brighter than a hundred suns, was not always nor even usually visible; although, like a lamp placed behind a curtain, it may have usually imparted to the cloud which concealed it a tempered and dusky glow. There were occasions when the veil of this temple was rent asunder; and then

the light shone out with intense splendour — dazzling all eyes, and convincing sceptics that this cloud, now resting on the tabernacle, and now, signal for the host to march, floating upward in the morning air, was not akin to such as are born of swamps or sea; and which, as emblems of our mortality, after changing from rosy beauty into leaden dullness, melt into air, leaving the place that once knew them to know them no more for ever. This symbol and token of the Divine presence was of all the types and figures of Jesus Christ in some respects both the most apposite and glorious: a cloud with God within, and speaking from it—going before to guide the host—placing Himself for their protection between them and their enemies—by day their grateful shade from scorching heat, by night their sun amid surrounding darkness.

It was one, and not the least singular of its aspects, that this cloud always grew light when the world grew dark—the cloudy pillar of the day blazing forth at

night as a pillar of fire. So shone the divinity in Him who was "Emmanuel, God with us," His darkest circumstances, His deepest humiliations, being the occasions of His greatest glory. He was buried, and being so, was greatly humbled; but angels attended His funeral, and guarded His tomb. He was crucified, condemned to the death of the vilest criminal, and being so, was greatly humbled; but those heavens and earth which are as little moved by the death of the greatest monarch as by the fall of a withered leaf, expressed their sympathy with the august Sufferer—the sun hid his face, and went into mourning, the earth trembled with horror at the deed. He was born, and in like manner He was greatly humbled, and had been, though His birth had happened in a palace and His mother had been a queen; but with a poor woman for His mother, a stable for His birth-place, a manger for His cradle, and straw for His bed, these meannesses, like its spots on the face of the sun, were lost in a blaze of glory. Earth did not celebrate His

advent, but Heaven did. Illumining her skies, she sent herald angels to proclaim the news, and lighted up a new star to guide the feet which sought the place where man's best hopes were cradled. The most joyful birth that ever happened, it was meet that it should be sung by angel lips,—and all the more because, redemption glorifies God in the sight of holy angels.

II.

REDEMPTION GLORIFIES GOD IN THE SIGHT OF HOLY ANGELS.



HEY take a lively interest in the affairs of our world, as the Scriptures show, and as Jacob saw in his vision ; for what else means that ladder where they appeared to his dreaming eye ascending and descending between earth and heaven ? To the care of John our dying Lord committed his mother ; but God, when He sent His Son into the world, committed Him to their care,—“ He hath given his angels charge over thee, that thou dash not thy foot against a stone.” The care which their Head enjoyed is extended to all the members. How happy are the people that are in such a case ! Think of the poor saint who has none to wait on him, or the pious domestic who serves a table, and humbly

waits on others, having angels to wait on her ! Are they not said in Scripture to be "ministering spirits sent forth to minister to them who are heirs of salvation ?"—however the world may despise them, "this honour have all his saints." However lowly their earthly state, the saints are a kingly race ; and as our highest nobles deem it an honour to wait on the princes of the blood, accepting and soliciting offices at court, the angels are happy to serve such as, through their union with His incarnate Son, stand nearer the throne of God than themselves. Unseen by him, these celestials guard the good man's bed ; watch his progress ; wait on his person ; guide his steps ; and ward off many a blow the devil aims at his head and heart. They are the nurses of Christ's babes ; the tutors and teachers of His children. A belief in guardian saints is a silly Popish superstition ; but we have good authority in Scripture for believing that in this our state of pupilage and probation, along all the way to Sion, in the conflicts with temptation, and amid the thick of battle, God commits

His saints to angels' care ; and that, as it is in their loving arms that the soul of an aged saint is borne away to glory, every child of God has its own celestial guardian, and sleeps in its little cradle beneath the feathers of an angel's wing. What said our Lord ? On setting a child before the people as a pattern for them to copy, "Take heed," He said, "that ye despise not one of these little ones ; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven."

But whether we are, or are not, the happier for angels, there is no question that they are the happier for us. They always loved God ; but since man's redemption they love Him more, and employ higher strains and loftier raptures to praise His wisdom, power, holiness, justice, and love. It has disclosed to them new views of God, and opened up in heaven new springs of pleasure. Heaven has grown more heavenly, and though they might have deemed it impossible to add one drop to their happiness, they are holier

and happier angels. There is joy among the angels of heaven over every sinner that repenteth ; and to the joyful cry, My son that was dead is alive again, they respond, as they receive the returned penitent from the Father's arms into their own, My brother that was dead is alive again, that was lost is found ! Never from surf-beaten shore or rocky headland do spectators watch with such anxious interest the life-boat, as, now scen and now lost, now breasting the waves and now hurled back on the foaming crest of a giant billow, she makes for the wreck, as they watch those who, with the Bible in their hearts and hands, go forth to save the lost. And when the poor perishing sinner throws himself into Jesus' arms, what gratulations among these happy spirits ! "There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons." The event is one which I can fancy was in the prophet's eye, when, fired with rapture, he cried, "Sing, O ye heavens ; for the Lord hath done it : shout, ye lower parts of the earth ; break forth into sing

ing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel!" And the heavens do sing. While the saints, descending from their thrones, cast their sparkling crowns at Jesus' feet, and ten times ten thousand harps sound, and ten times ten thousand angels sing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."

III.

REDEMPTION GLORIFIES GOD THROUGHOUT ALL THE UNIVERSE.

WITH a small band of fishermen at His side, and no place on earth where to lay His head, Jesus pointed to the sun, riding high in heaven or rising over the hill-tops to bathe the scene in golden splendour, and said, "I am the Light of the world." A bold saying ; yet the day is coming, however distant it appears, when the tidings of salvation carried to the ends of the earth, and Jesus worshipped of all nations, shall justify the speech ; and the wishes shall be gratified, and the prayers answered, and the prophecies fulfilled, so beautifully expressed in these lines of Heber :

"Waft, waft, ye winds, His story,
And you, ye waters, roll,
Till, like a sea of glory,
It spreads from pole to pole."

But shall our world be the limits of the wondrous tale ? Though ever and deeply interesting as the scene of redemption, just as to patriots is the barest moor where a people fought and conquered for their freedom, our earth holds in other respects but a very insignificant place in creation. In a space of the sky no larger than a tenth part of the moon's disc, the telescope discovers many thousands of stars, each a sun, attended probably by a group of planets like our own : their number indeed is such that many parts of the heavens appear as if they were sprinkled with gold-dust ; and probably there are as many suns and worlds in the universe as there are leaves in a forest, or rather, sands on the ocean shore.

Boldly venturing out into the regions of speculation, some have thought that, if sin defile any of these worlds, its inhabitants may share in the benefits of the atonement which Christ offered in ours ; and that beings further removed than we from the scenes of Calvary, and differing more from us than we from the Jews of

whom the Messiah came, may, as well as we, find a Saviour by faith in Jesus ; and that for this end the work of redemption has perhaps been revealed to such as, removed from our earth many millions of miles, never even saw the planet that was its theatre and scene. There may be nothing in this. I dare not say it is impossible ; but these speculations touch the deep things of God, and we would not attempt to be wise above that which is written. Still, Scripture affords ground for believing, for hoping, at least, that the story of redemption has been told in other worlds than ours, and that the love of God in Christ—that fairest, fullest manifestation of our Father's heart—links all parts of creation together, and links all more closely to the throne of God. “He that hath seen me, Philip,” said our Lord to that disciple, “hath seen the Father also ;” and as I believe that He who delights to bless all His unfallen creatures would not withhold from the inhabitants of other spheres the happiness of knowing Him in His most adorable, gracious, and glorious

character, I can fancy them eagerly searching their skies for a sight of our world,—the scene of that story which has conveyed to them the fullest knowledge of Him they love, their deepest sense of His ineffable holiness and unspeakable mercy. Not from pole to pole, but from planet to planet, and from star to star, the love of Christ deserves to be proclaimed ; and it is a thought as grand as it is probable, that the story of Calvary, not yet translated into all the tongues of earth, is told in the ten times ten thousand tongues of other worlds, and that the Name which is above every name—the blessed Name which dwells in life in a believer's heart and trembles in death on his lips—is known in spheres which his foot never trod and his eye never saw. Such honours crown the head man once crowned with thorns ; and therefore did David, with the eye of a seer and the fire of a poet, while calling for praise from kings of the earth and all people, princes and all judges, young men and children, rise to a loftier flight, ex-

claiming : "Praise Him in the heights.
Praise ye Him, all ye angels : praise ye
Him, all His hosts. Praise ye Him, sun
and moon : praise Him, all ye stars of
light."

IV.

THE REDEEMER AND REDEMPTION ARE
WORTHY OF OUR HIGHEST PRAISE.

LET us bend the head, and, in company of the shepherds, enter the stable. Heard above the champing of bits, the stroke of hoofs, the rattling of chains, and the lowing of oxen, the feeble wail of an infant turns our steps to a particular stall: here a woman lies stretched on a bed of straw, and her new-born child, hastily wrapped in some part of her dress, finds a cradle in the manger. A pitiful sight!—such a fortune as occasionally befalls the Arabs of society—such an incident as may occur in the history of one of those vagrant, vagabond, outcast families who, their country's shame, tent in woods and sleep under hedges, when no barn or stable offers a covering to their houseless heads.

Yet princes on their way to the crown,
brides on their way to the marriage, ban-
nered armies on their way to the battle,
and highest angels in their flight from star
to star, might stop to say of this sight, as
Moses of the burning bush, "Let me turn
aside, and see this great sight!"

The prophet foretells a time when the
wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the
leopard shall lie down with the kid; and,
bound in the same stall, and fed at the
same manger, the lion shall eat straw with
the ox. Here is a greater wonder! This
stable is the house of God, the very gate
of heaven: under this dusty roof, inside
those narrow walls, He lodges whom the
heaven of heavens cannot contain: the
tenant of this manger is the Son, who,
leaving the bosom of His Father to save
us, here pillows His head on straw; of
this feeble babe the hands are to hurl
Satan from his throne, and wrench asunder
the strong bars of death; this one tender
life, this single corn-seed is to become the
prolific parent of a thousand harvests, and
fill the garners of glory with the fruits of

salvation. Mean as it looks, yet more splendid than marble palaces,—more sacred than the most venerable and hallowed temples, here the Son of God was born, and with Him were born Faith, Hope, and Charity—our Peace, our Liberty, and our Eternal Life. Had He not been born, we had never been born again; had He not lain in a manger, we had never lain in Abraham's bosom; had He not been wrapped in swaddling-clothes, we had been wrapped in everlasting flames; had His head in infancy not been pillowed on straw, and in death on thorns, ours had never been crowned in glory. But that He was born, better we had never been; life had been a misfortune to which time had brought no change, and death no relief, and the grave no rest. "Glory to God in the highest" that He was born: we had otherwise been lifting up our eyes in torment with this unavailing, endless cry, "O that my mother had been my grave! Cursed be the day wherein I was born?"

If language cannot express the love and


gratitude we owe to the Saviour, let our lives do so. Shallow streams run brawling over their pebbly beds, but the broad, deep river pursues its course in silence to the sea; and so is it with our strongest, deepest feelings. Great joy like great sorrow, great gladness like great grief, great admiration like great detestation, take breath and speech away. On first seeing Mont Blanc as the sun rose to light up his summit and irradiate another and another snow-clad pinnacle, I remember the silent group who had left their couches to witness and watch the glorious scene: before its majesty and magnificence all were for awhile dumb, opening not the mouth. I have read, when travellers reached the crest of the hill, and first looked down on Jerusalem,—the scene of our Saviour's sorrow, the garden that heard His groans, the city that led Him out to die, the soil that was bedewed with His tears and crimsoned with His blood,—how their hearts were too full for utterance. If a sight of the city where He died so affects Christians, as the scenes

of His last hours rush on their memory and rise vividly to their imagination, how will they look on that scene where, surrounded by ten times ten thousand saints and thousands of angels, He reigns in glory! I can fancy the saint who has shut his eyes on earth to open them in heaven, standing speechless; and as the flood of music fills his ear, and the blaze of glory his eye, and the thought of what he owes to Jesus his heart,—I can fancy him laying the crown, which he has received from his Saviour's hands, in silent gratitude at His feet; and as he recovers speech, and sees hell and its torments beneath him, earth and its sorrows behind him, an eternity of unchequered, unchanging bliss, before him,—I can fancy the first words that break from his grateful lips will be, "Glory to God, glory to God in the highest!" Never till then, nowhere but there, will our praise be worthy of Jesus and His redemption. Meanwhile, let Him who demonstrates God's highest glory and fills heaven's highest throne, hold the highest place in

our hearts. Let us surround His name with the highest honours ; and, laying our time and talents, our faculties and our affections, our wealth, and fame, and fortunes at His feet, crown Him Lord of all.

PART III.

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OME years ago the question which agitated the heart of Europe was, Peace or War?

The interests of commerce, the lives of thousands, the fate of kingdoms, trembled in the balance. Navies rode at anchor, and opposing armies, like two black thunder-clouds, waited for statesmen to issue from the council-chamber, bearing the sword or the olive-branch. Esteeming the arbitrament of battle one which necessity only could justify, Britain longed for peace; but, with ships ready to slip their cables, and soldiers standing by their guns, she was grimly prepared for war. Had ambassadors from the nation with which we were ready to join issue approached our shores at this crisis, what eager crowds would have attended their advent, and how impatiently would they have waited the course of events! And had peace been the result of the conference, how would the tidings, as

they passed from mouth to mouth, and were flashed by the telegraph from town to town, have filled and moved the land ! The pale student would have forgot his books, the anxious merchant his speculations, the trader his shop, the tradesman his craft, tired labour her toils, happy children their toys, and even the bereaved their griefs ; and like the whirlpool, which sucks straws and sea-weed, boats and gallant ships—all things, big or small—into its mighty vortex, the news would have absorbed all other subjects. The one topic of conversation at churches and theatres, at marriages and funerals, in halls and cottages, in crowded cities and in lonely glens ; ministers had carried it in their sermons to the pulpit, and devout Christians in their thanksgivings to the Throne of Grace.

In a much greater crisis, where the stakes were deeper, the question being not one of peace or war between man and man, but between man and God, an embassy from heaven reached the borders of our world. Unlike Elijah, rough in

dress, of aspect stern and speech severe, whose appearance struck Ahab with terror, and wrung from the pale lips of the conscience-stricken king the cry, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?"—unlike Jonah as he walked the wondering streets, and woke their echoes with his doleful cry, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be destroyed,"—the ambassadors were "a multitude of shining angels." Leaving the gates of heaven, they winged their flight down the starry sky to descend and hover above the fields of Bethlehem, and in the form of a song, as became such joyful tidings, to proclaim news of Peace—their song, "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good-will toward men." Nothing presents a more remarkable example of "much in little" than these few but weighty words. In small crystals, that coat, as with shining frost-work, the sides of a vessel, we have all the salts which give perpetual freshness to the ocean, their life to the weeds that clothe its rocks, and to the fish that swim its depths and shallows. In some drops of

oil distilled from rose-leaves of Indian lands, and valued at many times their weight in gold, we have enclosed within one small phial the perfume of a whole field of roses—that which, diffused through ten thousand leaves, gave every flower its fragrance. Essences, as they are called, present, in a concentrated form, the peculiar properties of leaves or flowers or fruits, of the animal, vegetable, or earthly bodies from which they are extracted; and, like these, this hymn presents the whole gospel in a single sentence. Here is the Bible, the scheme of redeeming love, that grand work which saved a lost world, gladdened angels in heaven, confounded devils in hell, and engaged the highest attributes of the Godhead, summed up in one short, glorious, glowing paragraph. For what so much as the gospel, what, indeed, but the gospel, yields Jehovah the highest glory, blesses our earth with peace, and expresses Heaven's good-will to the sons of men? Such were the ambassadors, and such the embassy!

When the king of Babylon, hearing how

the shadow had travelled back ten degrees on the dial of Ahaz, sent ambassadors to Hezekiah to inquire about this strange phenomenon, Hezekiah received them with the greatest respect; paid them honours, indeed, which cost both him and his country dear. The news of an embassy having come to Joshua spread like wildfire among the Israelites, moving the whole camp. Seized with eager curiosity, all ran to hear what the strangers had to say, and gaze with wonder on their soiled and ragged dress, their clouted shoes and mouldy bread. The herald angels, though arrayed in heavenly splendours, and bringing glad tidings of peace, were received with no such honours, excited no such interest. Strange and sad omen of the indifference with which many would hear the gospel! While angels sung, the world slept; and none but some wakeful watchers heard their voices or beheld this splendid vision. They were humble shepherds, to whom the ambassadors of heaven delivered their message; and it may be well to pause and look at those who were privileged and

honoured to hear it. We do not pretend to know certainly the reasons why God, who giveth no account of His ways, conferred an honour so distinguished on them rather than on others. But we may guess ; and in any case may find the employment profitable and instructive, if we are wise enough to find "sermons in stones, books in the running brooks, and good in everything."

V.

THEY WERE MEN OF A PEACEFUL CALLING.

THE highest view of the profession of arms is, that the soldier, deterring evil-doers and maintaining order at home, on the one hand, and prepared, on the other, to resist hostile invasion, is in reality, notwithstanding his deadly weapons and warlike garb, an officer or instrument of peace. A day is coming—alas! with the roar of cannon booming across the ocean, how far distant it seems!—when Christianity shall exert a paramount influence throughout all the world: then, tyrants having ceased to reign, and slaves to groan, and nations to suffer from the lust of gold or power, this beautiful picture of the prophet shall become a reality: “The whole earth,” said the seer, “is at rest, and is quiet; they break forth into singing.” Till then, para-

doxical though it appears, the cause of peace may be pled with most effect by the mouths of cannon. Fitness for war is often the strongest security for peace ; and a nation whose wishes and interests both run in the direction of peace, may find no way of warning restless and unprincipled and ambitious neighbours that it is not to be touched with impunity, but by showing itself, thistle-like, all bristling over with bayonets. "Necessity," said Paul, "is laid on me to preach." It may be laid on a people to fight. Nor, when the sword has been drawn in a good cause, has God refused His sanction to that last, terrible resort. It was He who imparted strength to the arm before whose resistless sweep the Philistines fell in swathes, like grass to the mower's scythe. It was He who guided the stone that, shot from David's sling, buried itself in the giant's brow. It was He who gave its earthquake-power to the blast of the horns which levelled the walls of Jericho with the ground. And when night came down to cover the retreat of the Amorites and their allies, it was He

who interposed to secure the bloody fruits of victory—saying, as eloquently put by a rustic preacher, “‘Fight on, my servant Joshua, and I will hold the lights;’ and ‘the sun stood still on Gibeon, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon.’” Admitting war to be an awful scourge, these cases show that the duties of a soldier are not inconsistent with the calling of a Christian.

Yet it was over no battle-field, the most sacred to truth and liberty, these angels hovered ; no blazing homesteads nor burning cities shed their lurid gleam on the skies they made radiant with light ; nor was it where their sweet voices strangely mingled with the clash of arms and the shouts of charging squadrons that they sang of glory, good-will, and peace. This had been out of keeping with the congruity which characterises all God’s works of nature, and which will be found equally characteristic of His works of providence and grace. As was meet, the glad tidings of peace were announced to men who were engaged in an eminently peaceful occupation ; who passed tranquil


lives amid the quietness of the solemn hills, far removed alike from the ambitious strife of cities and the bloody spectacles of war. Lying amid the solitudes of the mountains, where no sounds fall on the ear but the bleating of flocks, the lowing of cattle, the hum of bees, the baying of a watch-dog from the lonely homestead, the murmur of hidden rills, the everlasting rush of the waterfall as it plunges flashing into its dark, foaming pool, pastoral are eminently peaceful scenes. Indeed, the best emblem of peace which a great painter has been able to present he owes to them—it is a picture of a quiet glen, with a lamb licking the rusty lips of a dismounted gun, while the flocks around crop the grass that waves above the slain.

Apt scholars of the devil, wicked men have used Holy Scripture to justify the most impious crimes. Others, with more fancy than judgment, have drawn the most absurd conclusions from its facts; but we seem warranted to conclude, that by selecting shepherds to receive the first tidings of Jesus' birth, apart from the circum-

stance that they were Christ's own favourite types of Himself, God intended to confer special honour on the cause, and encourage the lovers and advocates of peace. Deer are furnished by nature with horns, dogs with teeth, eagles with talons, serpents with poison, and bees with stings; but men have no weapons of offence. Yet, acting under the dominion of their lusts, men have a passion for fighting, and, easily fired with the spirit, and dazzled with the glory of war, are ready to abandon arguments for blows; and I cannot but think that He who would not permit David, the man after His own heart, to build Him a house because he had been a man of blood, conferred this honour on these humble shepherds because they were men of peace. Whether it be with Himself or our own consciences, in the midst of our families, among our neighbours, or between nation and nation, He enjoins us to cultivate peace: in His own emphatic words, we are to "seek peace and pursue it."

VI.

THEY WERE MEN OF HUMBLE RANK.

 ANY in humble, as well as in more coveted circumstances, are discontented with their position. They repine at their lot, and murmur against the Providence which has assigned it. This is not only wicked but absurd, since true happiness lies much less in changing our condition than in making the best of it, whatever it be. Besides, God says, "I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir;" and the estimate which He forms of us turns in no respect whatever on the place we fill. One artist paints a grand, another a common, or even a mean, subject; but we settle their comparative merits, praising this one and condemning that, not by the subjects they paint, but by the way they

paint them. To borrow an illustration from the stage, (as Paul did from heathen games,) one player, tricked out in regal state, with robes, and crown, and sceptre, performs the part of a king, and another that only of a common soldier or country boor; yet the applause of the audience is not given to the parts the actors play, but to the way they play them. Even so, it is not the place that man fills, whether high or humble, but the way he fills it to which God has, and we should have, most regard.

Not that we would reduce the inequalities of society any more than those of the earth, with its varied features of swelling hill and lovely dale, to one dull, long, common level. Death, the great grim leveller, does that office both for cottagers and kings. Let it be left to the sexton's spade. The mountains which give shelter to the valleys, and gather the rains that fill their rivers and fertilise their pastures, have important uses in nature, and so have the corresponding heights of rank and wealth and power in society. Setting

our affections on things above, let us be content to wait for the honours and rest of heaven; let us seek to be good rather than great; to be rich in faith rather than in wealth; to stand high in God's esteem rather than in man's; saying, with Paul, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content;"—or singing with the boy in the "Pilgrim's Progress," who, meanly clad, but with "a fresh and well-favoured countenance," fed his father's sheep,—

"He that is down needs fear no fall;
He that is low, no pride;
He that is humble ever shall
Have God to be his guide.

"I am content with what I have,
Little be it or much;
And, Lord, contentment still I crave,
Because thou savest such."

"Do you hear him?" said the guide.
"I will dare to say that this boy lives a merrier life, and wears more of that herb called heart's-ease in his bosom, than he that is clad in silk and velvet."

Why should a man blush for his humble origin? The Saviour's mother was a poor

woman; and no head ever lay in a meaner cradle than the manger where Mary laid her first-born—the Son of the Most High God. Why should any be ashamed of honest poverty? Men of immortal names, the apostles, were called from the lowest ranks, and went forth to conquer and convert the world without a penny in their purse. Was not our Lord himself poor? He earned His bread, and ate it, with the sweat of His brow, while others lay luxuriously on down; He had often no other roof than the open sky, or warmer bed than the dewy ground; and never had else to entertain His guests than the coarsest and most common fare—barley-loaves and a few small fishes. Though rich in the wealth of Godhead, with the resources of heaven and of earth at His sovereign command, poverty attended His steps like His shadow, along the way from a humble cradle to a bloody grave. He made Himself poor that He might make us rich; and it seemed meet that to poor rather than to rich men God should reveal the advent of Him who came to enrich the

poor, whether kings or beggars, peers or peasants. As if to censure the respect paid to rank apart from merit, or to wealth apart from worth, He who has no respect for persons honoured in these shepherds nonest poverty and humble virtue. They received ambassadors not accredited to sovereigns; as cottages, not palaces, housed Him whom the heavens have received, and the heaven of heavens cannot contain.

VII.

THEY WERE MEN ENGAGED IN COMMON DUTIES.

MOTHERS cumbered with a load of domestic cares, merchants worried with business, statesmen charged with their country's affairs, and thousands who have a daily fight to keep the wolf from the door, fancy that, if they enjoyed the leisure some have, and could bestow more time on divine things, they would be more religious than they are, and, rising to higher, calmer elevations of thought and temper, would maintain a nearer communion with God. It may reconcile such to their duties to observe how the men were employed on whom God bestowed this unexpected and exalted honour. They were engaged in the ordinary business of their earthly calling; of a hard and humble

one. Types of Him to whose care His people owe their safety amid the temptations, and their support amid the trials of life, these shepherds were watching their flocks; peering through the gloom of night; listening for the stealthy step of the robber; ready, starting to their feet, to beat off the sneaking wolf, or bravely battle with the roaring lion.

He whose sun shines as brightly on the lowliest as on the stateliest flower, regards with complacency the humblest man who wins his daily bread, and discharges the duties of his station, whatever they be, in such a way as to glorify God and be of advantage to his fellow-creatures. Heaven, as this case brilliantly illustrates, is never nearer men, nor are they ever nearer it, than in those fields or workshops, where, with honest purpose and a good conscience, they are diligently pursuing their ordinary avocations. No doubt—for God does not cast His pearls before swine—these shepherds were pious men. One passing a night in their humble dwellings would have seen the father with reverent

mien gather his household to prayer; and one passing these uplands, where they held their watch, might have heard their voices swaying on the midnight air, as they sang together the psalms of David amid the very scenes where he tuned his harp and fed his father's flocks. But people are too apt to suppose that religion lies mainly, if not exclusively, in prayers, reading the Bible, listening to sermons, and attending on sacraments; in time spent, or work done, or offerings made, or sacrifices endured, for what are called, in common language, religious objects. These are the means, not the end. He who rises from his knees to his daily task, and, with an eye not so much to please men as God, does it well, carries divine worship to the workshop, and throws a sacred halo around the ordinary secularities of life. That, indeed, may be the highest expression of religion; just as it is the highest expression of devoted loyalty to leave the precincts of the court and the presence of the sovereign, to endure the hardships of a campaign, and stand in

soiled and tattered regimentals by the king's colours amid the deadly hail of battle. He who goes to common duties in a devout and Christian spirit proves his loyalty to God ; and, as this case proves, is of all men the most likely to be favoured with tokens of the Divine presence—communications of grace which will sustain his patience under a life of toil, and fit him for the rest that remaineth for the people of God.

PART IV

MINGLED with its rattling shingle, the sea-beach bears hazel-nuts and fir-tops—things which once belonged to the blue hills that rise far inland on the horizon. Dropped into the brooks of bosky glens, they have been swept into the river, to arrive, after many windings and long wanderings, at the ocean; to be afterwards washed ashore with shells and wreck and sea-weed. The Gulf Stream, whose waters by a beautiful arrangement of Providence bring the heat of southern latitudes to temper the wintry rigour of the north, throws objects on the western coasts of Europe which have performed longer voyages—fruits and forest-trees that have travelled the breadth of the Atlantic, casting the productions of the New World on the shores of the Old.

Like these, the record of events which happened in the earliest ages of the world has been carried along the course of time,

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and spread by the diverging streams of population over the whole surface of the globe. The facts are, as was to be expected, always more or less changed, and often, indeed, fragmentary. Still, like old coins, which retain traces of their original effigies and inscriptions, these traditions possess a high historic value. Their remarkable correspondence with the statements of the Bible confirms our faith in its divinity; and their being common to nations of habits the most diverse, and of habitations separated from each other by the whole breadth of the earth, proves the unity of our race. If they cannot be regarded as pillars, they are buttresses of the truth; being inexplicable on any theory but that which infidelity has so often, but always vainly, assailed, namely, that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and that He has made of one blood all the nations of the earth.

To take some examples. Look, for instance, at a custom common among the Red Indians, ages before white men had crossed the sea and carried the Bible to

their shores! At the birth of a child, as Humboldt relates, a fire was kindled on the floor of the hut, and a vessel of water placed beside it; but not with the murderous intent of those savage tribes who practise infanticide, and, pressed by hunger, destroy their children to save their food. The infant here was first plunged into the water—buried, as we should say, in baptism; and afterwards swept rapidly and unharmed through the flaming fire. A very remarkable rite; and one that, as we read the story, recalled to mind this double baptism, “He shall baptize you,” said Jesus, “with the Holy Ghost and with fire;” “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Its administration to infants, to such as had committed no sin, nor knew, indeed, their right hand from their left, implied a belief in the presence, not of acquired, but of original impurity. It is based on that; and without it this rite is not only mysterious, but meaningless. Blind is the eye which does not see in this old pagan ceremony a tradition of

the primeval Fall, and dull the ear which does not hear in its voice no faint echo of these words, "I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. . . . Create in me a clean heart, O God ; and renew a right spirit within me."

Like the Fall, the Flood also was an event which, though it may have worn no channel in the rocks, has left indelible traces of its presence on the memory of mankind. The Greeks had strange traditions of this awful judgment ; so had the Romans ; and so had almost all the heathen nations of antiquity—strange legends, to which the Bible supplies the only key. Its account of the Deluge explains the traditions, and the traditions corroborate it ; and by their general mutual correspondence we are confirmed in our belief that its authors were holy men of old, who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. To evade this argument, infidels may trace these legends to Jews, who, led captive of the heathen, related to them the Mosaic story, and took advantage of man's love of the

marvellous to practise on his credulity. The attempt is vain ; since, on turning from the Old World to the New, we find the very same traditions there ; and there, long ages before Jew or Christian knew of its existence, or had landed on its shores. Those paintings which were to Mexicans and Peruvians substitutes for history, for a written or printed language, embody the story of the Flood. One of these pictures, for example, shows us a man afloat with his family in a rude boat on a shoreless sea ; in another, the raven of Bible story is cleaving on black wing the murky sky ; in a third, the heads of the hills appear in the background like islands emerging from the waste of waters, while, with such confusion as is inseparable from traditionary lore, the raven is substituted for the dove, and appears making its way to the lone tenants of the boat with evidence of the subsidence of the waters—a fir-cone in its bloody beak. Rolled down the long stream of ages, the true history is more or less changed, and even fragmentary, like a water-worn stone.

Still, between these traditionary records and Bible story there is a remarkable agreement. They sound like its echo. In them pagan voices proclaim the holiness of God. Lest we also should perish with those who, looking on the placid sea and starry sky of the Old World's last night, asked, "Where is the promise of His coming?" they warn us to flee from wrath to come.

Of all these venerable legends painted in colours or embalmed in verse, written in story or sculptured on stone, none are more remarkable than those where the serpent appears. Old divines imagined that the creature whose shape Satan borrowed for the temptation had originally no malignant aspect; neither the poisoned fangs, nor eyes of fire, nor cold, scaly, wriggling form which man and beast recoil from with instinctive horror. They fancied that the curse, "Upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat," was followed by a sudden metamorphosis, and that till then the appearance of the serpent was as lovely as it is now loathsome. They gave

the words of the curse a literal interpretation. They bear a deeper meaning, no doubt ; yet the fancy of these old divines may have approached nearer to fact than many perhaps suppose. Science reads the history of remote ages as she finds it inscribed on the rocks ; and, on turning over these stony leaves, we find that the earliest form of the serpent was different from that which, as it crawls and wriggles along the ground, so forcibly recalls the very words of the curse. Though they have now only such powers of motion as belong to the meanest worm, those skeletons which the rocks entomb show that the serpent tribe had once feet to walk with, and even wings to spurn the ground and cleave the air. Such is the testimony of the rocks ! And, taking the words of Scripture in their literal sense, there is, to say the least of it, a very curious coincidence between the voices of the rocks and the voice of revelation. But, be that as it may, what else but fragmentary traditions of Eden and the Fall are the forms of serpent worship among the heathen, who acted, as

they still often act, on the principle of propitiating the powers of evil, the many old monuments on which its figure is sculptured, and the many old legends in which it plays a conspicuous part? What else was the belief of our pagan fathers, that within a dark cave in the bowels of the earth there sat a great scaly dragon, brooding on gold? What else was the fabled garden of the Hesperides, where the trees, guarded by a fierce and formidable serpent, bore apples of gold? What else was the tragic story of a father and his sons dying by the bites and crushed within the scaly folds of a coil of serpents; and on which, as touchingly represented in the sculptured marble, we have never looked without recalling the fate of Adam and his unhappy offspring? And what else is the old legend of him who with rash hand sowed serpent's teeth, and saw spring from the soil, not clustering vines, or feathery palms, or stalks of waving corn, but a crop of swords, and spears, and armed men? Read that fable by the light of the Bible, and the wild legend stands out the record of

an awful fact. To the serpent the world owes it wars, and discords, and the sin which is their source. Disguised in its form, Satan brought in sin; and when sin entered on the scene, peace departed—peace between God and man, peace between man and man, peace between man and himself—the peace which, with all its blessings, He descended from heaven to restore who is our Peace, and whom angels ushered on the scene of His toils and triumphs, of His atoning death and glorious victory, with songs of “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men.”

VIII.

JESUS RESTORES PEACE BETWEEN GOD AND MAN.

HERE are things which God cannot do—which it were not to honour but dishonour Him to believe He could. He can neither tempt, nor be tempted, to sin. The sinner He may love, but not his sin; that is impossible; as the prophet expresses it, “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity.” Indeed, I would as soon believe that God could condemn a holy spirit to the pains of hell, as admit a guilty one, unjustified and unsanctified, to the joys of heaven. In that terrible indictment which God thunders out against Israel by the mouth of Ezekiel, He says, “Thou art the land which is not cleansed. Her princes in the midst thereof are like wolves ravening the

prey, to shed blood, and to destroy souls, to get dishonest gain. Her prophets have daubed them with untempered mortar, saying, Thus saith the Lord God, when the Lord hath not spoken. The people of the land have used oppression, and exercised robbery, and have vexed the poor and needy ; therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them ; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath : their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord." So he arraigns this and the other class. And how of the priests? "Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things : they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they showed difference between the unclean and the clean." He censures His servants for not separating between the clean and unclean ; and it insults Him to suppose that He could do in His own practice what He condemns in theirs. Events, such as old murders brought to light, ever and anon occur to show that God's mill, as runs the proverb, though it

grinds slow, grinds sure ; yet because He does not execute judgment speedily on workers of iniquity—giving them space to repent ; because He often seems, like one far remote from earth, to treat its crimes and virtues with equal indifference, men have not believed these solemn words, “There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.” But let the wicked hear His words, and take the warning, “Thou hatest instruction ; thou castest My words behind thee. When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him. Thou hast been partaker with adulterers. Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue practiseth deceit. Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother ; thou slanderest thine own mother’s son. These things hast thou done, and I kept silence ; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself : but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. Consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.”

The universal conscience of mankind is

stricken with a sense of guilt. Alarmed by an instinctive sense of danger, men have felt the need of reconciliation ; and, under a sense of His displeasure, have everywhere, and in all ages, sought to make their peace with God. For this end altars were raised and temples built ; sacrifices offered, and penances endured. If the colossal structures of Egypt, and the lovely temples of Greece and Rome, were erected, as well to adorn the state as to please the gods, it was less to please approving, than to appease angry divinities, that their courts resounded with the cries of victims, and smoking altars ran red with blood. So much did the heathen feel their need of peace, such store did they set by it, that many of them sought it at any price. They would buy peace at any cost ; nor did they shrink from giving all their fortune, even the fruit of their body, for the sin of their souls. For peace with God the Hindoo walked to his distant temples in sandals that, set with spikes, pierced his flesh at every step, and marked all the long, slow, painful journey

with a track of blood ; for peace with God the Syrian led his sweet boy up to the fires of Moloch, and, unmoved in purpose by cries, or curses, or passionate entreaties, cast him shrieking on the burning pile ; for peace with God the Indian mother approached the river's brink with streaming tears and trembling steps, and, tearing the suckling from her bursting heart, kissed it, to turn away her eyes, and fling it into the flood. We pity their ignorance. But how do they rebuke the indifference of many ; their unwillingness to submit to any sacrifice whatever for the honour of Jesus and the interests of their souls ? These heathens may pity thousands whom they shall rise up in judgment to condemn. Neglecting the great salvation, preferring the pleasures of sin, what a contrast do these offer to a poor Hindoo, who, hearing a missionary tell of the blood of Christ, sprang from the ground, and, loosing his bloody sandals, flung them away to exclaim, " Now, now I have found what I want ! "

The peace which he found all men

want, and shall find in Jesus, if they seek it honestly, earnestly. God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. He never had. We pronounce him an unnatural father, who, on a breach occurring between him and his child, though he is the injured and not the injurer, does not long to be reconciled—is not the first to make advances and overtures of peace. In this feature of the parental character God has stamped upon our hearts the beautiful image of His own. Yearning over them as the kind old man over his wayward prodigal, his exiled child, God was willing to receive back sinners to His arms ; to reinstate them in His family, and restore them to His favour. But how was this to be done?—done without dishonour to His holy law, and with due regard to His character as a God of truth. He had said, “The soul that sinneth shall die ;” nor could peace be restored between Him and man but on such terms as maintained His truth. A father or mother punishes one child, and allows another, guilty of the same offence, to go free. But had God cast fallen angels into

hell, and, without any regard to His word, admitted fallen men to heaven, what had angels, what had devils, what had men themselves thought of a God who conducted his government with such caprice—playing fast and loose with His most solemn words? “The way of the Lord,” said ancient Israel, “is not equal;” and in such a case there had been ground for the charge, and none for the indignation with which He repels it, saying, “Hear now, O Israel, is not my way equal? are not yours unequal?”

There was only one way of restoring peace; but it involved a sacrifice on God's part which the most sanguine had never dared to hope for. If the Lord of heaven and earth, veiling His glory, would assume our nature, would take the form of a servant, would stoop to the work of a subject, would die the death of a sinner, we might be saved—not otherwise; if He would leave heaven, we might enter it—not otherwise; if He would die, we might live—not otherwise; if He would enter the grave its captor, we might leave it its conquerors—

not otherwise ; if He, as our substitute, would fulfil the requirements of the law, both in doing our work and discharging our debt, both obeying and suffering in our stead, peace could be restored—not otherwise. For these ends God did not spare His Son, but gave Him up to death, “that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life ;” and the “set time” having come at length, Jesus descended on our world, to make peace through the blood of His cross—His angel-train, ere they returned to heaven, holding a concert in the skies.

Dying, the just for the unjust, He has made peace ; and these are the easy terms, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” How gladly should we accept them ? If men reject peace, what chance for them in war ? “Hast thou an arm like God ? Canst thou thunder with a voice like him ?” “Let the potsherds strive with the potsherds of the earth ; but woe to the man who striveth with his Maker !” He has proclaimed a truce—granting a suspension of arms, and

offering most generous proposals of peace. How should men improve the pause, and accept the overtures!—as eagerly seizing salvation through the cross of Christ as a drowning man life through the rope some kind hand flings within his reach. In warfare patriots have stood up gallantly against overwhelming odds, and, closing their broken ranks, have said, “Better fall on the field, better lose life than honour;” but when sinners, dropping the weapons of rebellion, yield themselves up to God, honour is not lost, but won, in a crown that fadeth not away. Brave men have said, “Better fight to the last, die with our swords in our hands, than become captives to pine away a weary, ignoble life within the walls of a prison;” but when the sinner gives himself up to God, he goes not to exile but home; not to chains and a dungeon, but to glorious freedom, a palace, and a throne. God asks you to give up your sins that they, not you, may be slain. It is of them, not of you, He says, “But those mine enemies which would not that

I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me !”

In these circumstances, oh for the wisdom of her who showed herself on the city walls in the thick of the assault, crying to Joab, “Hear, hear, come near hither, I pray you, that I may speak with thee !” A woman’s figure there, her voice sounding above the thunder of the captains and the shouting, suspends the attack. Assailants and assailed alike rest on their arms ; and as one marked as a leader by his plume and bearing, covered with the dust and blood of battle, steps forward, she bends over the battlements to ask, “Art thou Joab ?” “I am he,” is the reply. “Then hear the words of thy handmaid,” she cries ; “I am one of them that are peaceable and faithful in Israel : thou seekest to destroy a city and a mother in Israel !” He solemnly repudiates the charge. “Far be it from me,” he answers, “that I should swallow up and destroy. The matter is not so : but a man of Mount Ephraim, Sheba, the son of Bichri, hath lifted up his hand

against the king, against David : deliver him only, and I will depart from the city." She accepts the terms ; and saying " Behold, his head shall be thrown to thee over the wall "—vanishes. Prompt in action as wise in counsel, she goes to the people, deals with them, sways the multitude to her will ; and ere the last hour of the brief truce has closed, a bloody head goes bounding over the wall. It rolls like a ball to the feet of Joab ; and in its grim and ghastly features they recognise the face of the son of Bichri. So Joab blows the trumpet, and the host retires from the walls, every man to his own tent. So let men deal with their sins. Let them die with the son of Bichri : they have " lifted up their hand against the King." Why should we spare them, and lose our souls ? By His precious blood Jesus has opened up a way to peace. He has come, but not " to swallow up and destroy." Blessed Lord, He came to save, not to destroy. " O earth, earth, earth," cried the prophet, " hear the word of the Lord ;" and be it known to the world's utmost bounds that

God willeth not the death of the sinner, but rather that he would turn to Him and live. With her flaming sword, red with the blood of men and angels, Justice holds to us no other language but that of Joab, "Deliver up your sins only, and I will depart!" and, inspired of God with the wisdom that chooseth the better part, and maketh wise unto salvation, let us say, "Better my sins die than I; better Satan be cast, than Jesus be kept out of it; better strike off the heads of a thousand sins that have lifted up their hands against the King, than that I should fall—sparing my sins to lose my soul!"

PART V.



AHAB and Jezebel, two of the worst characters in sacred story, had a son ; and with such blood as theirs in his veins, no wonder that Joram, on succeeding to the throne of one parent, exhibited the vices of both. His mother does not seem to have had a drop of human-kindness in her breast. Yet he was not altogether dead to humanity, as appears by an incident which occurred during the siege that reduced his capital to the direst extremities. The ghastly aspect of a famished woman who throws herself in his way with a wild, impassioned, wailing cry of "Help, my lord, O king!" touches him ; and he asks, "What aileth thee?" Stretching out a skinny arm to one pale and haggard as herself, she replies, with hollow voice, "This woman said unto me, Give thy son, that we may eat him to-day, and we will eat my son to-morrow. So we boiled

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my son, and did eat him : and I said unto her on the next day, Give thy son, that we may eat him ; and she hath hid her son." Struck with horror at the story, Joram rent his clothes. He had pity, but no piety.

"Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will but revolt more and more." Never were these words, never was the fact that unsanctified afflictions have the same hardening effect on men which fire, that melts gold, has on clay, more strikingly illustrated than on this occasion. So far from rending his heart with his garment, and humbling himself before the Lord, Joram flares up into fiercer rebellion ; and turning from these victims of the famine to his courtiers, he grinds his teeth to profane God's name and vow vengeance on his prophet, saying, "God do so and more also to me, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall stand on him this day." Impotent rage against the only man who could have weathered the storm, and saved the state ! The prophet's head stood on his shoulders when that of this

son of a murderer—as Elisha called him—lay low in death in the dust of Naboth's vineyard. The day arrives which sees the cup of Joram's iniquity full, and that of God's patience empty—drained to the last drop. The chief officers of the army are sitting outside their barrack, when one wearing a prophet's livery approaches them. Singling out Jehu from the group, he says, I have an errand to thee, O captain! The captain rises; they pass in alone; the door is shut; and now this strange, unknown man, drawing a horn of oil from his shaggy cloak, pours it on Jehu's head. As if it had fallen on fire, it kindled up his smouldering ambition—so soon at least as this speech interpreted the act, “Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I have anointed thee king over the people of this land. Thou shalt smite the house of Ahab thy master; dogs shall eat Jezebel in the portion of Jezreel, and there shall be none to bury her.” Having spoken so, the stranger opens the door, and flies. But faster flies God's vengeance. Ere his feet have borne the servant to Elisha's

door, the banner of revolt is up, unfurled ; troops are gathering to the sound of trumpets ; and soldiers, eager for change and plunder, are making the air ring to the cry, Jehu is king !

Launched like a thunderbolt at the house of Ahab, Jehu makes right for Jezreel with impetuous, impatient speed. A watchman on the palace tower catches afar the dust of the advancing cavalcade, and cries, I see a company ! Guilt, which sleeps uneasy even on downy pillows, awakens, on the circumstance being reported to him, the monarch's fears. A horseman is quickly despatched with the question, Is it peace ? Thus, pulling up his steed, he accosts the leader of the company, who, drawing no rein, replies, in a tone neither to be challenged nor disobeyed, What hast thou to do with peace ? Get thee behind me ! Failing the first's return, a second horseman gallops forth to carry the same question and meet the same reception. Sweeping on like a hurricane, the band is now near enough for the watchman to tell, " He

came near unto them, and cometh not again ;” and also to add, as he marks how their leader is shaking the reins and lashing the steeds of his bounding chariot, “The driving is like the driving of Jehu, the son of Nimshi ; for he driveth furiously.” Displaying a courage that seemed his only redeeming quality, or bereaved of sense, according to the saying, Whom God intends to destroy He first makes mad, Joram instantly throws himself into his chariot, advances to meet the band, and demands of its leader, Is it peace, Jehu ? What peace, is the other’s answer, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother and her witchcrafts are so many ? With the words that leave his lips an arrow leaves his bow to transfix the flying king—entering in at his back and passing out at his breast ; and when he is cast, a bloody corpse, into Naboth’s vineyard, and dogs are crunching his mother’s bones, and Jehu has climbed the throne, and Elisha walks abroad with his head safe on his shoulders, and the curtain falls on the stage of these tragic and righteous scenes,

it was a time for the few pious men of that guilty land to sing, "Lo thine enemies, O Lord, lo thine enemies shall perish; but the righteous shall flourish like the palm-tree: they shall grow like a cedar of Lebanon."

Such was the mission of Jehu, the son of Nimshi. How different that of Jesus, the Son of God! They might have been identical; presented at least grounds of comparison rather than grounds of striking contrast. Yet so remarkable is the contrast that Jehu's mission—and therefore have we related the story—forms as effective a background to Christ's, as the black rain-cloud to the bright bow which spans it. The cause of the difference lies in God's free, gracious, sovereign mercy—in nothing else; for had mankind, at the tidings that the Son of God, attended by a train of holy angels, was approaching, met Him on the confines of our world with Joram's question, "Is it peace?" that question might justly have met with Jehu's answer, "What hast thou to do with peace?"—what have you done to obtain

it, or to deserve it? Yet, glory be to God in the highest, it is peace—peace more plainly and fully announced in these most gracious words, “It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; and, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things to himself, whether they be things on earth, or things in heaven.”

IX.

JESUS BRINGS PEACE TO THE SOUL.

HAVING reconciled us to God by the blood of His cross, Christ is "our Peace," as the apostle says. He is called so, first, because He restores us to a state of friendship with God; and, secondly, because a sense of that fills the whole soul with a peace which passeth understanding. So, speaking of the righteousness which Christ wrought out for us, the prophet says, "The work of righteousness is peace"—His righteousness being the root, and our peace the fruit—that the spring, and this the stream. To describe for the comfort of the Church the constancy of the last and the fulness of the first, another prophet borrows two of nature's grandest images, "Thy peace shall be like a river, and thy righteousness like the waves of

the sea"—the believer's peace flowing like a broad, deep stream, with life in its waters and smiling verdure on its banks; and a Saviour's righteousness covering all his sins, as the waves do the countless sands of their shore, when, burying them out of sight, the tide converts the whole reach of dull, dreary sand into a broad liquid mirror, to reflect the light of the sky and the beams of the sun.

Christ's imputed righteousness is bestowed equally on all believers—none, the least any more than the greatest sinner, being more justified than another. Feeling assured or not of their salvation, all His are equally safe—"those whom Thou hast given me I have kept, and none of them are lost." There is no such equal enjoyment among believers of peace in believing; some walking all their days under a cloud, and some who walk in darkness and have no light, only reaching heaven, like a blind man guided homewards by the hand of his child, by their hold of the promise, Who is he that feareth the Lord and obeyeth the voice

of His servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light; let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay himself in his God. But where there is peace springing from a sense of forgiveness, of all the fruits of the Spirit that grow in Christ's fair garden, this is sweetest. Among the blessings enjoyed on earth, it has no superior, or rival even. It passeth understanding, says an apostle. Nor did David regard any as happy but those who enjoyed it—pronouncing “blessed,” not the great, or rich, or noble, or famous, but “the man,” whatever his condition, “whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.” And so he might. With this peace the believer regards death as the gate of life: enters the grave as a quiet anchorage from seas and storms; and looks forward to the scene of final judgment as a prince to his coronation, or a happy bride to her marriage day. A sense of forgiveness lays the sick head on a pillow softer than downs; lightens sorrow's heaviest burdens; makes poverty rich

beyond the wealth of banks ; spoils death of his sting ; arms the child of God against the ills of life ; and, lifting him up above its trials, makes him like some lofty mountain, at whose feet the lake may be lashed into foaming billows, and adown whose seamed and rugged sides clouds may fall in gloomy folds, but whose head, shooting up into the calm blue heavens, reposes in unbroken peace, rejoices in perpetual sunshine.

Happy such as obtain a firm hold of Christ, and, having made their calling and election sure, enjoy unclouded peace ! Feeling that there is now no more condemnation for them, because they believe in Jesus, and walk not after the flesh but after the spirit, they see a change come on objects such as imparts pleasure and surprise in what are called dissolving views. Where death, with grim and grisly aspect, stood by the mouth of an open grave, shaking his fatal dart, we see an angel form opening with one hand the gate of heaven, and holding in the other a shining

crown—from the face of God we see the features of an angry, stern, inexorable judge melt all away, and in room of an object of terror we behold the face and form of a kind, loving, forgiving Father, with open arms hastening to embrace us. The God of hope give you joy and peace in believing, is the prayer of the apostle—a prayer in many cases so fully answered that the dying saint has been borne away from all his earthly moorings ; and, ready to part from wife and children, has exclaimed with Simeon when he held the infant Saviour in his joyful arms, “Now, Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.”

“Be at peace among yourselves,” is a blessed injunction which an apostle lays on families, on friends, and on churches. In happy contrast to the storm which, hurtling through the troubled air, and shaking doors and windows, goes raving round every corner of the house, let peace reign on the domestic hearth, and also

within the church, when, like the ark of old, she drifts on the billows of a shoreless sea—God only at the helm.

It is good to be at peace with our brethren, but to be at peace with one's-self is better. At peace with conscience, one can afford, if God will have it so, to be at war with all men. It is painful, when we cannot be at peace with all men—to have enemies without ; but his case is infinitely worse who lodges an enemy in his own breast—in a guilty, uneasy conscience, in self-reproaches, in terror of death, in the knowledge that God and he are not friends, nor can be so, so long as he cherishes his sins. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked. There cannot be. Drugged with narcotics, you may sleep as quietly on a bed of thorns as of roses. Drugged with narcotics, you may lie down on the cold pavement, and fancy as you throw your arms around the curbstone that it is the wife of your bosom. Drugged with narcotics, you may go to sleep in a cell with visions of home play-

ing round the head that shall be capped for hanging to-morrow. But no more than I call these peaceful sights, can I apply the name of peace to the insensibility of a conscience seared by sin; to the calmness, or rather callousness of one who has allowed the devil to persuade him that God is too merciful to reckon with us for our transgressions. The peace we are to seek, and, seeking to pursue, is not that of death, but life,—not that the lake presents in winter, when no life appears on its shores, nor sound breaks the silence of its frozen waters; but that of a lake which, protected from tempests by lofty mountains, carries life in its waters, beauty on its banks, and heaven mirrored in its unruffled bosom. Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Such is the peace which we are to seek—a peace which, springing from a sense of reconciliation through the blood of the Lamb and wrought within the soul by the in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit, has so raised the saint above all

fears of death, and shed such a flood of glory around his dying head, that wicked men have turned from the scene to exclaim, May I die the death of the righteous, and may my last end be like his !

X.

JESUS SHALL BRING PEACE TO THE WORLD.

HOW many pages of history are written with the point of the sword—not with ink, but tears and blood? It is chiefly taken up with the recital of wars. What age has not been the era, what country the scene of bloody strifes? What soil does not hold the dust of thousands that have fallen by brothers' hands? Our glebes have been fattened with the bodies of the slain? On those fields where, with the lark carolling overhead, the peasant drives his ploughshare, other steel than the sickle has glanced, and other shouts have risen than those of happy reapers bearing some blushing, sun-browned maid on their broad shoulders at the Harvest Home. The tall gray stones, the hoary cairns, tell how on other days these quiet scenes.

were disturbed by the roar of battle, and lay red with another dye than that of heath or purple wild flowers. Go wherever our foot may wander, we find tokens of war ; and select what age soever we may, since Abel fell beneath a brother's hand, we find in man's first death, and the earth's first lone grave, a bloody omen of future and frequent crimes. What a commentary is human history on these words of Holy Scripture, "The whole creation groaneth, and travaileth in pain till now!—nor shall it cease to groan, or hail the day of its redemption, till the Prince of Peace is enthroned in the heart of all nations, and the labours of missionaries have extended that kingdom to the ends of the earth, whose triumphs are bloodless—whose walls are Salvation and her gates Praise."

Without disparagement to the happy influence of education, the extension of commerce, and the efforts of benevolent men, the real Peace Society is the Church of God ; the olive branch which the Spirit, dove-like, is bearing on blessed wing to a

troubled world, is the Word of God ; and the gospel's is the voice which, like Christ's on Galilee's waves, shall speak peace to a distracted earth, and change its wildest passions into a holy calm. Till all nations receive the Bible in its integrity and own it as their only rule of policy, till kings reign for Christ and lay their crowns at His feet, a lasting peace is an idle dream. Treaties will no more bind nations that lie under the influence of unsanctified passions, that chains him who dwelt among the tombs, and within whom dwelt a legion of devils. Till other and better days come, the best cemented peace is only a pause—a truce—an armistice ; the breathing-time of exhausted combatants. Alas, that it should be so : yet true it is, that that nation dooms itself to disaster, if not destruction, which, pursuing only the arts of peace, leaves its swords to rust, and its navies to rot, and forts with empty embrasures to moulder into ruins. The trumpet of the world's Jubilee has not yet sounded, nor have all the vials of the Apocalypse been emptied of the wrath

of God. And so, till the nations have emerged from spiritual darkness; till God's Word is an open book, and duly honoured in all lands; till immorality has ceased to weaken the bonds of social happiness, discontent to rankle in the bosom of the people, and ambition to fire the breasts of kings, the world may expect ever and anon to hear the voice of Joel sounding out this trumpet call, "Prepare ye war; wake up the mighty men; let all the men of war draw near—beat your ploughshares into swords and your pruning-hooks into spears—put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe."

Better days are coming—some think near at hand. Turning a seer's eye on futurity, Isaiah descried them in the far distance—saw the reign of the Prince of Peace—Jesus crowned King of kings and Lord of lords—swords beaten into ploughshares and spears into pruning-hooks—every man, whether at hall or cottage door, sitting under the shade of his vine and fig-tree—the whole earth quiet, and at rest. And glad is the Church. as,

weary of strife and sin and sorrow, she looks up into the darksome sky, and cries, Watchman, what of the night? to get a hopeful response,—to catch any sign, in break, or blush, or gray gleam however feeble, that seems to reply, The morning cometh! Come blessed morn, come Prince of Peace—come Lord Jesus—come quickly! Let wars cease unto the ends of the earth! Scatter Thou the people that delight in war.

The vision tarries, but come it shall. In answer to the cry of blood that rises to heaven with a different voice from that of Abel's, peace shall reign and wars shall cease. By the hands that men nailed to a cross God will break the bow, the battle, and the spear—burning the chariot in the fire. And though any peace which our age may enjoy should be only a breathing-time, but a pause in the roar of the bloody tempest, let us improve it to remedy all wrongs at home; to educate our ignorant and neglected masses; to eradicate the vices that disgrace and degrade our nation; to build up the Church wherever it lies in

ruins; to extend not so much Britain's empire as Christ's kingdom abroad, and so hasten forward the happy time when the Song of the Angels shall be echoed from every land, and the voices of the skies of Bethlehem shall be lost in the grander, fuller, nobler chorus of all nations, singing, Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, good will toward men!

PART VI.

THOUGH the last to be dropped into its place, the keystone is of all the stones of an arch the first in importance ; the others span no flood, carry no weight, are of no value, without it. It gives unity to the separate parts, and locking all together, makes them one. Of such consequence to the other parts of the Angels' Song is its last clause. It was not simply Glory to God, nor peace on earth, but good will toward men, which made the angels messengers of mercy, and the news they brought tidings of great joy. Glory to God ! Amid the rush of the waters that drowned the world, and the roar of the flames that laid Sodom in ashes, they sang glory to God. God is glorious in acts of judgment as well as in acts of mercy—"the God of Glory thundereth." So on

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shores strewn with the corpses of the dead, beside a sea which opened its gates for the escape of Israel and closed them on Egypt, burying king and bannered host beneath its whirling waves, Moses and Miriam cried, Sing ye to the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously ; the horse and his rider hath He cast into the sea ! Then the deep lifted up its voice, and all the waves of the sea sang Glory to God ! as, bearing the dead in on their foaming crests, they laid them at Moses' feet. And when that judgment comes to which these are but as the big drops that prepare us for a burst of thunder and the rushing rain, when the great white throne is set, and the books are opened, and the Judge rises in awful majesty to pronounce words of doom, the voices of ten times ten thousand saints shall add, Amen ; and in an outburst of praise that drowns the wail of the lost, the whole host of angels shall sing, Glory to God ! With such ascription of praise Christ's heralds would have announced His ad-

vent, had He come not to save, but to destroy.

"Glory to God," the first clause of this song, does not, therefore, necessarily involve good will towards men; and no more does the second, "peace on earth." Peace! Peace was in the valley where the prophet stood with the grim wrecks of war around him,—friend and foe sleeping side by side, skeletons silently turning to dust, and swords to rust. Peace is in the battle-field when the last gun is fired, and, the last of the dying having groaned out his soul in a gush of blood, the heaving mass is still. Peace was on the sea and the storm suddenly became a calm, when the waves leaping up against the flying ship obtained their prey, and from the deck where he stood summoned by the voice, Arise, O thou that sleepest, and call upon thy God, Jonah was flung into the jaws of death. Peace was in that land he had ravaged of whom men said, "He made a solitude, and called it peace,"—all its homesteads lay in ashes, and its

cities stood in silent ruins. Peace was in Israel, when, provoked by their sins, God cast His people out : swept them all into captivity. The land had its Sabbaths then. The Angels' Song might have announced a similar, but greater, judgment—that, as a landlord clears his estate of turbulent, lawless, bankrupt tenants, God, who had repented long ago that He had made man, was at length coming to clear the earth of his guilty presence, and make room for better tenants ; a purer, holier race. It is the last clause of this hymn, therefore, that gives it an aspect of mercy—the revenue of glory which God was to receive, and the peace which earth was to enjoy, flowing from that fountain of redeeming love which had its spring in God's good will. Of this Christ was the divine expression, and angels were the happy messengers.

Happy messengers indeed ! No wonder they hastened their flight to earth, and having announced the good tidings, lingered over the fields of Bethlehem, singing as

they hovered on the wing. To announce bad news is the unenviable office often imposed on ministers of the gospel; and recollecting with what slow, reluctant steps my feet approached the house where I had to break to a mother the tidings of the wreck, and how her sailor boy with all hands had perished; or, in the news of a husband's sudden death, I had to plant a dagger in the heart of a young, bright, happy wife. I never have read the story of Absalom's tragic end, without wondering at the race between Ahimaaz and Cushie who should first carry the tidings to David. It had been easier, I think, to look the foe in the face and hear the roar of battle than see the old man's grief, and hear that heart-broken cry, "O Absalom, my son, my son Absalom, would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" I can enter into the feelings of the two Marys, when, to quote the words of Holy Scripture, "they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy, and did run to bring the disciples


word." I see them, as, regardless of appearances, and saluting no one, they press on, along the road, through the streets, with panting breath and gleaming eye and streaming hair and flying feet, striving who shall be first to proclaim the resurrection, and burst in on the disciples with the glad tidings, crying, "The Lord is risen!" Teaching the Churches how to strive, their only rivalry who shall first carry the tidings of salvation to heathen lands, I dare to say those holy women never took such bounding steps, nor sped on their way with such haste before. And never, I fancy, did angels leave the gates of heaven so fast behind them, pass suns and stars in downward flight on such rapid wing, as when they hasted to earth with the tidings of great joy. May we be as eager to accept salvation as they were to announce it! May the love of God find a responsive echo within our bosoms! Would that our wishes for His glory corresponded to His for our good, and that His good will toward us awoke a corresponding good will toward Him—felt in hearts glowing with

zeal for Christ's cause, and expressed in lives wholly consecrated to His service.

In studying this, we shall now consider the persons to whom good will is expressed.

XI.

THE PERSONS TO WHOM GOOD WILL IS EXPRESSED.

T is expressed to men—to all men; so that if we are finally lost, the blame as well as the bane is ours. God has no ill will to us, or to any. He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked; nor is He willing that any should perish, but that all should come to Him, and live. His good will embraces the world.

“When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the Son of man, that thou visitest him?” So said the royal psalmist. And, in a sense, time should only have deepened the astonishment which this question ex-

presses. For man's ideas of the magnificence of the heavens have grown with the course of ages ; and though the stars in the transparent atmosphere of Palestine shone with a brilliancy unknown to us, our conceptions of the heavens are grander and more true than David's—thanks to the discoveries of modern science. As navigators, so soon as by help of the mariner's compass they could push their bold prows into untravelled seas, were ever adding new continents to the land and new islands to the ocean, so, since the invention of the telescope, science has been discovering new stars in the heavens ; filling up their empty spaces with stellar systems, and vastly enlarging the limits of creation. And since every new orb has added to the lustre of Jehovah's glory, another world to His kingdom, another jewel to His crown, these discoveries, by exalting God still higher, have added point and power to the old question, "What is man, that thou art mindful of him ? and the Son of man, that thou visitest him ?"

Yet, apart from man's sinfulness, I cannot feel that he is beneath the regards of the Maker and Monarch of the starry heavens. I can fancy that an earthly sovereign who, dwelling apart from his people, is jealous of their intrusion within his palace gates, and sits enthroned amid an exclusive though brilliant circle of proud and powerful barons, may neither know nor care about the fortunes of lowly cottagers ; but there could be no greater mistake than out of such a man's character to weave our conceptions of God, or fancy that because we are infinitely beneath His rank, we are therefore beneath His notice. A glance at the meanest of His creatures refutes and rebukes the unworthy thought. It needs no angels from heaven to inform us that God cherishes good will to all the creatures of His hand, nor deems the least of them beneath His kind regards. Look at bird, or butterfly, or beetle ! Observe the lavish beauty that adorns His creatures, the bounty that supplies their wants, the care taken of their lives, the happiness, expressed in songs or merry gambols or

mazy dances, which He has poured into their hearts. The whole earth is full of the glory of God's infinite benignity and good will. Insignificant as I—a speck on earth, and earth itself but a speck in creation—seem to myself when, standing below the starry vault, I look up into the heavens, yet, apart from the thought that I am a sinner, I cannot say, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? How can I, when I see Him mindful of the brood that sleep in their rocking nest, of the moth that flits by my face on muffled wing, of the fox that howls on the hill, of the owl that hoots to the pale moon from ivy tower or hollow tree? Are you not of more value than many sparrows? said our Lord. Fashioned originally after the divine image, with a soul outweighing in value the rude matter of a thousand worlds, able to rise on the wings of contemplation above the highest stars and hold communion with God himself, man, apart from his sinfulness, was every way worthy of divine good will; that God should be mindful of him.

But we are sinners—sinners by nature as well as practice ; polluted ; unholy ; so unclean that our emblem is that hideous form which, from the crown of the head to the soles of the feet, is wounds and bruises and putrifying sores ; and the news that God cherishes good will to such guilty creatures may well evoke the old, wondering cry, Hear, O heavens ; be astonished, O earth ! On recalling the happy days of early life, when, a child, he lay in his father's arms ; a boy, he sat on his knee ; a youth, he walked by his side—the tears that at parting streamed over the old man's cheeks—his kind counsels, his tender warnings, his warm kisses, and how he had stood and watched his departing steps till the brow of a hill or a turn of the road hid him from view, the poor prodigal ventured to hope that his father would not turn him from his door ; for the sake of the past and of his mother in the grave, would grant him at least a servant's place. Weighed down by a sense of guilt, his hopes rose to no higher flight—expected nothing beyond a menial's office.

'To be received with open arms, to be welcomed back again like some youth who has gone abroad to win a fortune or be crowned with laurels—that his should be the fairest robe, the finest ring, the fatted calf—that instead of stealing in under the cloud of night to be concealed from strangers' eyes, the old house on his return should ring to the sound of music, and floors should shake to the dancers' feet, and the whole neighbourhood should be called to rejoice with a father whose shame and sorrow he had been, was a turn of fortune he never dreamt of; never dared to hope for. On the part of that loving, forgiving father, what amazing good will! But how much more amazing this which God proclaimed by the lips of angels, and proved by the death of His beloved Son!


I have known fathers and mothers who were sorely tried by wayward, wicked children—I have seen their gray hairs go down with sorrow to the grave. With hearts bleeding under wounds from the hands of one they loved, I have seen them

welcome the grave ; saying as they descended into its quiet rest, "the days of my mourning are ended." It is a horrid crime to wring tears from such eyes, to crush such hearts : but was ever patient, hoping, loving parent tried as we have tried our Father in heaven ? Not without reason does He ask, "If I be a father, where is mine honour ? if I be a master, where is my fear ?" And who that thinks of his sins, their guilt, their number, and, as committed against infinite love and tender mercy, their unspeakable atrocity, but will acknowledge the truth of these words, "Because I am God, and not man, therefore the children of men are not consumed"—just as it is because the ship rides by a cable, and not a cobweb, that, when sails are rent, and yards are gone, and breakers are foaming on the reef, she mounts the billows and survives the storm. That we are not suffering the pains of hell, that we have hopes of heaven and ever shall be there, we owe not to our good works, but to God's good will ; to that only. Till converted, man does not

desire this good will ; and never deserves it. We have no claim to it whatever. It is "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy God saves us, by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost"—therefore His good will has no root in any good works of ours. A sacred mystery, we may apply to it the words which Job, contemplating the grand mysteries of nature, applied to our earth when, seeing this great globe floating in ethereal space, sustained by no pillars, nor suspended by any chain that linked it to the skies, he said, Thou hast hung it upon nothing !

XII.

THE PERSON WHO EXPRESSES "GOOD WILL."

 HE person is God—He who spake by holy men of old, speaking here-by the lips of angels. Where there is a will, there is a way, is a brave and admirable proverb. Yet, though comparatively true in most cases, to some it is altogether inapplicable. Look, for example, at the women who, when the men had turned cowards, boldly follow our Lord to Calvary, bewailing and lamenting Him! What tears they shed, what a wail they raise, when the door opens, and, surrounded by armed guards, Jesus comes forth from the Judgment Hall, bleeding, bound, crowned with thorns. When He sank down on the street under the weight of the cross, and His blessed head lay low

in the dust, had there been a chance of saving Him, how had they rushed to His help; and, giving their naked breasts to the Roman spears, burst through the circle to rescue Him; to die with Him rather than desert Him. But they were helpless. Their good will availed the loved object nothing—beyond this, that the sympathy flowing in their tears and expressed in their looks, somewhat soothed the sorrows of His heart, and fell like balm drops on His smarting wounds.

Again, what good will did David bear to Jonathan! Did Jonathan love David as his own soul? and under circumstances calculated to dissolve all common friendships, and work such change on the heart as wine suffers when it turns into vinegar, did Jonathan's sentiments continue unchanged, his affection unabated to the last? His love was strong as death; many waters could not quench it. But it was amply requited. David proved that with his harp; had he been present on that fatal field where the bow of Jonathan was broken, he had proved it with his sword.

With what a lion spring had he answered Jonathan's cry for help; how had he bestrode his fallen friend, covering him with his battered shield; mowing a way through the ranks of the Philistines, how had he borne him off to a place of safety, or falling in the attempt, left others to compose their elegy, and sing, They were pleasant in their lives, and in death they were not divided! God is a very present help in time of trouble; but there was no help for Jonathan in David. Far away from that bloody field, his good will availed Jonathan nothing—beyond embalming his rare virtues in immortal song, and in an imperishable lament raising an imperishable monument to the memory of a man whose love to him was wonderful, passing the love of women.

Again, what good will in his father's heart to Esau? But the old man's hands are tied. Fresh from the chase, and ignorant of what has happened in his absence, Esau approaches Isaac, saying, Let my father arise and eat of his son's venison, that thy soul may bless me!

Who art thou? says the blind old man—astonished that any should ask what he has already given away. Recognising the beloved voice which replied, I am thy son, thy first-born Esau, and dreading some dire calamity, Isaac trembled exceedingly, crying, “Who? where is he that hath taken venison and brought it me; and I have eaten of all before thou camest, and have blessed him? yea, and he shall be blessed.” By the basest, cruelest fraud, Jacob has possessed himself of the blessing; and if their mother, his own partner in guilt, was watching the issue of this perfidious plot, how had it pierced her heart to hear Esau, when the truth flashed on his mind and he saw the treasure stolen, cry, “with a great and exceeding bitter cry, Bless me, even me also, O my father!” The strong man, the bold hardy hunter, lifted up his voice and wept; seeking repentance, as the apostle says—to get Isaac to undo the deed—with tears but found it not. What availed his father’s good will to him, his favourite son? What was done must stand.

The blessing was gone ; and Isaac, though he had the will, had no way to recall it.

But what need to ransack old history for examples? How often have our hearts overflowed with good will, yet we could only weep with them that wept—pity sorrows we could not soothe, wants we were powerless to relieve? Tears we might give, but they could not clothe the naked, or feed the hungry, or save the dying, or recall the dead, or close the wounds which death had made. In dying chambers how are we made painfully, bitterly to feel that man's power is not commensurate with his will? What good will, what tender affection toward some dear, beloved object! yet, as we hung over the dying couch, all we could do was to moisten the speechless lips, to wipe the clammy sweat from death's cold brow and watch the sinking pulses of life's ebbing tide. What would we not have done to meet the wishes of the eye that, when speech was gone, turned on us imploring, never-to-be-forgotten looks! Alas, our good will availed them nothing!

Such recollections, by the contrast which they present to God's good will, greatly enhance its preciousness. "His favour is life, his loving-kindness is better than life." Where God has a will, God always has a way. At the throne of divine grace, none had ever to shed Esau's tears, or cry with him, Hast thou but one blessing, O my father? Our father in heaven is affluent in blessings, plenteous in redemption, abundant in goodness and in truth. Who ever turned an imploring eye on God, and brought to prayer the earnestness of him that bends the knee to yon blind old man, but became in time the happy object of God's loving, saving mercy. Let men trust in the Lord. In the name of Christ let them throw themselves on His mercy. What though they cannot see it? It is around them, like the invisible but ambient air on which the eagle, with an awful gulf below, throws herself from her rocky nest in fearless freedom, and with expanded wings. So let men, trusting in God's faithful word, spread out the wings of faith, and cast them on His

good will. Wrapping the world round in an atmosphere of mercy, it shall sustain their weight, and bear them aloft, till, ascending into the calm regions of Christian hope, they bathe their eyes in the beams of the Sun of Righteousness, and feel their feet firmly planted on the Rock of Ages.

But let one thing be remembered, this, namely, that God will not save any against their will. Let us therefore seek, and seek till we obtain, a change of heart. He draws, not drives—will not force any into heaven—nor be served by the hands of a slave. If I would not have a sullen, crouching slave wait at my table, work in my house, stand in my poor presence, much less He who says, Give me thy heart, my son! He makes His people willing in the day of His power. Softened in the flames of Divine love, their stubborn wills yield to His, and, under the hand of His Holy Spirit and the hammer of His mighty word, take the fashion and form of His own. Thus, His will and their wills being brought into perfect harmony,

THE ANGELS' SONG. 141

His people feel their duty to be their
delight, and regard His holy service as no
irksome bondage, but the truest liberty
and highest honour.

THE END.

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